

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 COME-00

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8163

INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 11960

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EWWT EG

SUBJECT: PASSAGE OF AMERICAN PRESIDENT LINES PRESIDENT POLK
THROUGH SUEZ CANAL WITH CARGO FOR HAIFA

REF: STATE 275406 (NOTAL)

1. I RECALL BEING BRIEFED ON PROPOSED TRANSIT OF
THE PRESIDENT POLK THROUGH THE SUEZ CANAL WITH
CONTAINERIZED CARGO BOUND FOR HAIFA, BUT WAS NOT
GIVEN COPY OF STENMETZ/MATTHEWS MEMO.

2. GOE HAS REFUSED TO AGREE THAT VESSELS PASSING
THROUGH CANAL WITH CARGOS BOUND FOR ISRAEL BE
ALLOWED TO TRANSIT ROUTINELY. INSTEAD, IT INSISTS
ON HANDLING EACH SUCH VESSEL ON A CASE BY CASE
BASIS TO INSURE THAT CARGO IS NON-STRATEGIC,
THERE ARE NO ISRAELI CREWMEN ABOARD, AND THAT THERE
IS NO DELIBERATE ISRAELI EFFORT TO MAKE PROPAGANDA
OUT OF THE PASSAGE. LATTER IS, OF COURSE,
DIFFICULT TO CONTROL.

3. TO BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, PRESIDENT POLK
WILL BE THE FIRST AMERICAN FLAG VESSEL TRANSITING
CANAL WITH CARGO BOUND FOR ISRAEL. IF ISRAELIS
ATTEMPT EXPLOIT PASSAGE FOR PROPAGANDA PURPOSES
PRIOR TO THE VESSEL'S ARRIVAL AT SUEZ, WE CANNOT
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RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT EGYPTIANS WILL REACT

BY SEARCHING CARGO FOR STRATEGIC MATERIALS. NORMAL EGYPTIAN PRACTICE, AS WE UNDERSTAND IT, IS TO ACCEPT CARGO DOCUMENTATION AT FACE VALUE AND IF PP'S PROPOSED TRANSIT IS GIVEN LOW KEY HANDLING, DOCUMENTATION WILL PROBABLY SUFFICE. HOWEVER, THERE IS NO ABSOLUTE ASSURANCE THAT THIS WILL BE THE CASE SINCE MUCH DEPENDS UPON DISCRETION OF SUEZ CANAL AUTHORITIES.

4. WE DO NOT KNOW CONTENTS OF CONTAINERIZED CARGO BOUND FOR ISRAEL. IF IT IS NON-STRATEGIC, THERE SHOULD BE NO PROBLEM. IN ANY CASE, RECOMMEND VESSEL PROCEED AS PLANNED AND THAT, EVEN THOUGH EGYPTIANS HAVE ASKED US NOT TO NOTIFY THEM IN ADVANCE OF TRANSITS OF VESSELS CARRYING CARGO FOR ISRAEL, WE DO SO IN THIS CASE 4 OR 5 DAYS BEFORE PP IS DUE TO ARRIVE AT SUEZ. THIS MIGHT HELP TO INSURE SUEZ CANAL AUTHORITIES ARE PROPERLY INSTRUCTED. IN DOING SO, HOWEVER, IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO KNOW NATURE OF CONTAINERIZED CARGO.
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